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Language Learning One on One: A Personal Assessment

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LANGUAGE LEARNING ONE ON ONE:

A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the Master of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract: A diary study researching an individual language learning experience.

The author approaches the study with a discussion of his language learning and teaching background, motivation to study again, and choice of school. Using the diary kept during the four weeks of study, the assessment analyzes the elements which affected his learning: the homestay, the teachers, the curriculum taught and the methods used to teach it, and the author as a personality.

In the conclusion the author compares the one-on-one learning situation to a class situation stating his preference for the class. He also includes reflections on the diary study as a method of research.

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INTRODUCTION

This diary study examines a Spanish language learning situation with one teacher and one student, "one on one", and in this particular instance an intensive situation of four hours of daily study. Although the results of the learning situation were negative due to the circumstances involved, the study is not intended as an indictment of the "one on one". Rather it seeks to offer a perspective of this teaching/learning situation so that potential students and teachers will benefit and have a greater awareness of what might possibly be involved. With the insights of this study a student will be alerted to both the pitfalls and the advantages of the "one on one" and, therefore, be better able to determine if this type of learning situation is desirable. It is also hoped that a prospective teacher will learn from this study and enter a one-on-one teaching situation with a professional understanding of what to expect as a teacher and of what the student might expect in his/her own turn. Certainly all experiences need not be as negative as mine, but with the benefit of my experience, both potential students and teachers might have a better idea of the one-on-one teaching/learning situation and, therefore, avoid similar problems.

In the paper I first discuss my general language learning and teaching background. I examine both formal and informal language studies and what I consider to have been my successes and failures as a language learner. I look at my experiences as a language teacher and as a student of language teaching. Since the study is specifically concerned with a Spanish language learning experience, a more in depth view of my Spanish background is included. This is followed by an examination of my motivation for learning Spanish and the school selection process. Finally,

an assessment, which is the diary study, analyzes my one-on-one learning experience through certain significant variables which I identified as having a distinct effect on my studies: a homestay experience of living with a local family; my teachers, their personalities and professional skills; the curriculum and methods utilized; and finally myself as a learning personality.

As mentioned, this is a diary study of learning a language "one on one", one student being taught by one teacher in an intensive program of study. This is often termed a "tutorial", but for the purposes of my study and clarity I have chosen to use the term "one on one". "Tutorial" might possibly be confused with tutor, a person who teaches to supplement the primary source of instruction and commonly helps an individual student requiring remedial study. This latter interaction is not intensive in nature, i.e. it does not cover a long period of daily and weekly study. On the other hand, my one-on-one studies were intensive. I studied for four weeks (twenty sessions); there were no other students; and my teachers (they changed each week) were my only source of instruction.

When I first began keeping my diary of this Spanish language learning experience, I envisioned writing a diary study of the experience to analyze the strategies which I employed to learn a second language. I had not intended to use the diary to examine my particular experience of learning Spanish in the one-on-one fashion. However, after reading the completed diary, the obvious focus of the entries showed that my learning was primarily influenced by the situation and by several variables common in most learning situations, but which were particularly significant to my experience.

In keeping with my original objective, my diary entries initially centered on my learning strategies with general reflection on the learning

experience as well. However, as time progressed the diary drifted from my original object to a focus on the factors influencing my learning, and by the end of the four weeks of study and, therefore, the diary, I had abandoned completely my original purpose in keeping the diary. It was, however, only through a reading of the diary and reflection on its contents that I realized that I had abandoned my original objective, and that my diary had taken on quite a different significance, a significance which I thought was important enough to address in this study.

A DIARY STUDY

What is a diary study? A diary study is an analysis of a particular experience based upon the entries in a personal journal, in this instance a diary of a language learning experience. "The central characteristic of the diary studies is that they are introspective: The diarist studies his own teaching or learning."¹ The obvious central tool is the diary, and therefore, the quality of a study depends in large part on the quality of the diary entries. Apparently there exist courses in diary keeping, training the diarist to observe and reflect, presumably in a systematic manner, but other than of their existence, I know nothing about them. I offer this not as an apology, but for the perspective it puts on me and my diary. My only previous experiences with diaries were with journals which I kept during trips I have made. I imagine them to have been amateurish, though they do provide me with periodic reading pleasure.

In my diary I wrote what I saw and felt on a particular day while studying Spanish. Although I began the diary with a specific objective in

1. Kathleen M. Bailey and Robert Ochsner, "Methodological Review of Diary Studies: Windmill Tilting or Social Science?", Paper presented at L. A. Second Language Research Forum, UCLA, March, 1980, p. 2.

mind, I did not answer any specific questions on a daily basis, and as a result, there are no uniform themes which intentionally appear with each daily entry. Quite possibly I mentioned one idea on a single day and then did not return to it again for several days, if at all. The general theme of the diary in the end was, therefore, not the result of any forethought and intent on my part, but was a matter of chance and evolution from the experience.

My diary reflects changes in my mental state through the daily entries and through entry lapses, days when I wrote nothing. These lapses were occasionally due to a diversion which did not permit sufficient time to make an entry, but were more often due to a state of mind in which, I believe, I did not want to confront the problems I was experiencing. These lapses became more frequent towards the end of the learning period when I was in an advanced state of disillusionment with the experience. Afterall, it is easier to avoid the negative than to confront it.

In the paper I quote frequently from my diary. These references are normally noted as being from a specific day, i.e. day 1 or day 5, etc. I studied for a total of twenty days - five days a week for four weeks. For example, "Day 16" would be the first day of the fourth week. An occasional quote is not specifically referenced to a day because it was written prior to the learning experience, but it is noted as such.

LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING BACKGROUND

Prior to the Spanish language learning experience that this study is concerned with, I had several experiences in language study, both formal, in structured, academic settings and informal, through self-study and contact within linguistic groups. My formal language studies began in secondary school when I studied Latin (three years) and French (four years), and continued in college with Russian (two years). All my teachers utilized the Grammar Translation Method, and I was not a particularly successful student, not having been motivated by either myself or my teachers, and never achieved a great degree of fluency. In terms of grades I was a 'C' student. Today after 12-16 years I remember little or no Latin and Russian, but find that the extended exposure to four years of French has left me with some retention, though I have to struggle to understand and especially to speak.

I began a formal study of Thai after several extended visits to Thailand over a period of seven years. Through informal study during this time, I had acquired a good basic vocabulary and become familiar with the tones of that language. Five months into a one year stay I found my progress with Thai to be extremely slow and began taking formal lessons in spoken Thai of one hour per day. The classes were small, with 3-6 students, and were taught through the Audio-Lingual Method (AL-M). I studied for twenty weeks with two different teachers, both highly motivated, interesting and lively, and I felt that I achieved a high degree of success. I enjoyed my teachers and my classes and was extremely motivated by both. No grades were awarded, but I received a certificate stating completion of the equivalent of one academic year of college study. After this course in spoken Thai, I was much more fluent than after two years of

college Russian or the four years of high school French. Of course, I must attribute much of my success to living in the country, but I also owed a lot to my teachers who seemed to enjoy their teaching and worked hard at it. Between us there existed a kind of symbiotic relationship. As I was motivated to learn by their teaching, they were motivated to teach by my enthusiasm. I also had the added incentive in my classes of one or two other strong students who stimulated my learning efforts by making the class exciting through a sense of competition.

What I consider informal language acquisition, learning without the aid of teachers or a class, occurred while traveling for periods of a month or more in several countries. I normally stayed long enough to want to learn some of the language for purposes of survival and travel, and as a means of knowing and enjoying the country more fully, the case in Thailand before I undertook the formal class study. My informal study was accomplished through the use of dictionaries, phrase books, and enquiry, asking people for translations of useful vocabulary and phrases. Through this means I have at various times learned to survive and travel in Greek, Farsi, Korean and Thai (before beginning classes), and to carry on minimal conversations in German, Turkish, and Indonesian. Of course, I never achieved great fluency in these languages, never staying in one place long enough, but I often found myself the highest achiever in my peer group of travelers without formal language training.

My Spanish background has been mixed, containing both formal and informal study, and was, in terms of success, both moderately successful and almost non-existent depending on the experience. My first contact with Spanish occurred during a one month camping trip with a friend in Mexico in 1969. Since my friend spoke some Spanish, I tended to rely on him when communication was required and, as a consequence, I learned very

little. The trip was short; we isolated ourselves in our camping van; and at the time, I realized no value in speaking Spanish.

My next contact with Spanish occurred six years later for about two and a half months when I traveled again in Mexico and also in Guatemala. I was alone, traveled by public transportation this time, and had to learn Spanish to survive. By this time, too, I was aware of the cross-cultural benefits of speaking a local language, and I made an effort to learn some Spanish for that reason as well. I was sufficiently successful at the time to learn enough to travel and live plus carry on a basic conversation. Unfortunately, I did not experience any contact with Spanish again for four and a half years until, as part of a Master's curriculum in teaching ESL and prior to going to Mexico to do an English teaching internship, I studied Spanish for approximately thirty hours over a two week period in a class of about twelve students. I liked the experience and, though it is difficult to learn much in a short time, I was pleased with my success and rated my achievement as above average in the class. Knowing I was soon to go to Mexico and live with a family was strong motivation to learn. Additionally, I enjoyed the teacher and the other students.

This, however, was followed by a negative experience loosely associated with Spanish. After a short while in Mexico living with a homestay family as part of my internship, I lost my motivation for learning Spanish and stopped studying altogether. My "family" was quite strange and, as I later understood from other Mexicans, a very atypical Mexican family. I was alienated by them, and in turn, my reactions served to alienate the family. Consequently, my limited Spanish contact took place infrequently and usually only during excursions from the home. As a result, I left Mexico six weeks later only slightly more proficient than when I arrived.

Prior to the language learning experience examined in this paper, my

Spanish language background was narrow, and my acquisition was both successful in a limited way and negative. Despite this latter experience being most recent in my memory, I do not feel that I took adverse feelings toward Spanish and Spanish speakers with me into the learning experience. In fact, quite the opposite was true. I had a very positive feeling towards Guatemala and the Guatemalans from memories of my earlier visit to that country, and I had also been traveling for more than a month in Mexico already and was looking forward to the opportunity to improve my Spanish ability.

Within the last two years I had both taught ESL and been a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language. From both these experiences I had learned a great deal about language teaching.

As a teacher I had taught full time (6-8 hours per day) using the Audio-Lingual Method for nine months. I had never taught before, and although my teacher training for this job was solely in AL-M, I gradually learned that unvaried use of the AL-M curriculum led to both teacher and student boredom. Consequently, in order to vary the classes and provide added stimulation, I would attempt to provide additional materials which went beyond the normal curriculum. Unfortunately, my resources were rather limited since I had no previous teaching experience, since the existing curriculum was almost totally AL-M oriented, and since I was given no time in my work schedule to develop other materials.

As part of my Master's studies I was exposed to a broad range of teaching methods and techniques, both archaic and modern. Since the goal of my program was to develop humanistic teachers, the studies focused on the use of various methods and techniques in which the teacher took an active interest in promoting learning.

As a result of my teaching experiences, I was soon to become a student who was very sensitive to the role of the teacher in the learning process.

SCHOOL SELECTION

In September I commenced a trip in Mexico City with my friend, Debbie. We planned to travel through much of Latin America over an extended period, and for this reason we had been considering studying Spanish in Antigua, Guatemala, some friends having recommended a language school there. Preliminary travels in Mexico and areas of Guatemala only strengthened our resolve to study. Since we found ourselves to be not as linguistically proficient as we would have liked, since we knew that we would be in Spanish-speaking countries for a long time to come, and since we sought the greater contact permitted by competence in the language, we became more committed to learning Spanish.

Debbie and I had heard praises about a particular Spanish school, "El Centro", in Antigua offering individual, one-on-one, intensive language instruction for seven hours a day, and we thought this would meet our needs. While traveling prior to arriving in Antigua, we had also heard that Antigua had other language schools offering the same one-on-one instruction. Upon arrival we investigated and discovered that our original recommendation and choice, "El Centro", was solidly booked for several months. We also learned that the other schools were all offshoots from "El Centro", the first Spanish language school founded in Antigua, and all the schools reportedly offered the same basic curriculum.

We began to investigate the schools, seeking to determine for ourselves which was the "best". Because of our backgrounds as teachers of ESL and our recent experiences of studying teaching of second languages (Debbie had her MAT in ESL and French), we were highly critical during our search. We looked at a total of eight schools (out of approximately thirteen in the town), interviewing with the directors and talking with stu-

dents, trying to gather as much information as possible about each school. We investigated costs, teaching methods, teaching facilities, students' opinions of their schools, materials, the homestays that each school offered, and primarily the teachers, a major concern of mine which I noted in my diary during the school search.

The quality of the schools depends on the teachers. In a short time one bad teacher could ruin the experience. I want to reduce the chance of having one or more bad teachers.

The schools appeared very similar, most using the same books, and the teachers were reportedly qualified with "two years experience" or as having had "intensive training". Each school claimed that their teaching was adaptable to individual wishes, that Spanish was the sole language of instruction, and that they offered the opportunity to change teachers each week.

Sorting out the schools became the next task. One school was rejected because their brochure was ungrammatical, a fact which we interpreted as reflecting the quality of the school. Another, the "Tikal School", was rejected because it had a reputation for being more interested in making money than in teaching Spanish. Others were reported to have inexperienced and poor teachers, and still others had bad reputations among the students we talked to. One was eliminated because the school had a cramped environment with students scattered around a small courtyard in the director's private home.

Our choice was narrowed to two schools, one with a very professional brochure containing an excellent statement of teaching philosophy and very impressive school facilities, and the second with high recommendations from everyone we met who had attended it. I personally was attracted to the former because of their stated humanistic philosophy, which seemed

right out of our Master's program, an offer of a detailed evaluation of the teachers, and an offer of small classes of several students. However, despite its persuasive brochure with its advertised humanistic approach to teaching and the possibility of a class, this school was rejected as well on the report of a student in the school who said that the school only had one qualified teacher and their philosophy was definitely not of the standard advertised. Apparently their brochure was of a higher professional quality than the school, and it was also obvious that they lacked sufficient students of similar ability to form a class.

The last school was the "Escuela de Español Efectivo", chosen not only by the process of elimination but for two positive reasons. First, the school had been formed by teachers who had become dissatisfied with the teaching in the "Tikal School" and had left to form their own school as a cooperative. This impressed us. We felt that teachers interested enough in teaching to form a cooperative would probably be more sincere and dedicated to their work. Second, each teacher came recommended by students who had been studying there. It seemed from what we could gather that the teachers were experienced, having taught previously, and were dedicated and motivated since they had disagreed with the business practices of their previous employer and had left to form this school. Their costs were similar to the other schools. They promised individual homestays when other schools usually had several students living with one family. They offered the additional option of studying four hours or seven hours daily, with the possibility of changing at the end of each week, and they offered a different teacher each week to permit exposure to different voices, intonations and ideas. In addition, they offered instruction of a personalized nature, i.e. instruction of special interest material. The physical environment appeared adequate with small indivi-

dual classrooms, and though there were students in the courtyard, it was not crowded, leaving sufficient space between desks to prevent interference between students. For materials this school utilized a book written by the director, a fact which impressed us as another indication of teacher dedication. Relying on our initial impressions and the recommendations of others, we, therefore, made our choice, the "Escuela de Español Efectivo".

THE ASSESSMENT

The diary study analyzes the following variables which were identified as having a significant effect on my learning during my course of study: the homestay, a situation of living with a Guatemalan family; the teachers who had their own individual personalities and professional skills; the school's curriculum and the methods employed to present this curriculum; and me, the student.

The homestay was a situation in which I chose to involve myself. It was an option, one which I felt would be to my advantage both linguistically and culturally. It had no connection to the other variables other than me as the participant in all and was not a direct factor in the classroom and learning. However, in my case the homestay had a negative influence when it became a cause of serious concern and distraction during my first two weeks of study.

The methods and techniques, and curriculum were dependent on the teachers, their personalities and experience, and all closely involved me as the student with my own, individual personality. Although each is discussed separately for reasons of ease, they are not mutually exclusive. The teacher can be measured by the curriculum used, and the curriculum can be measured by how the teacher implements it. Methods and techniques are nothing without the teacher to employ them, and again, the teacher can be viewed by how he/she uses them. The student is, like the teachers, distinguished by his/her personality, but the final result of all learning depends largely on the input provided by the teacher and his/her use of the curriculum, methods and techniques.

Each of these variables is examined separately, but because of their close interrelationships, diary quotes are sometimes used more than once

when they pertain to more than one variable.

HOMESTAY

Although not directly involved in my one-on-one experience, the first of my two homestays did have an indirect but significant effect on my learning during my initial two weeks. The environment in which I lived during this time developed into a problem, and although physically separated from the school and the problems I had with it and my studies, the homestay had a damaging psychological impact on me and my studies.

As mentioned in the school selection section, one of the criteria on which Debbie and I judged the schools was the homestay which each offered. We knew that all the schools offered homestays in combination with the studies, and we wanted to take advantage of this opportunity for the added exposure to Spanish and the possible cultural insights to be gained by living with a family. We had heard of homestays with two or more students, and not wanting to be in such a situation, we were pleased when "Efectivo" guaranteed a homestay with no other students. To avoid the temptation of speaking English between ourselves, we decided to live with separate families.

Despite my desire to live with a family I did, however, have some reservations. While doing the school search, I had made the following notation in my diary concerning my apprehensions about the homestay:

I'm looking forward to another attempt [at a homestay], but I have a couple of fears: The family is doing it for an ulterior motive - money? I've heard of families which skimp on food for profit.

-Intolerance will arise over my linguistic inadequacies.

-I will be unable to relate to the family because of age, background or just their lack of interest in me.

These fears were all founded in the bad experience I had had with a

family in Mexico, and I just did not want to go through something similar again. Since the family had volunteered to have me and received no compensation, they had had no direct monetary profit gain from my presence, but indirectly I was there to their advantage. I was on a teaching internship and taught my classes in a classroom in the family home, and since the oldest daughter ran her own English school in the home, I helped to bring in students for her classes. My classes were free, but presumably when I left some students would return and pay. In the same house I had some extremely discouraging encounters with the mother, a very domineering woman who would often become enraged with me when I, with my rudimentary Spanish, could not understand her. She was too insensitive to realize that I was not very competent in Spanish and would get madder and madder at me the longer I was there, and this only served to alienate me more and more. Additionally, the family showed no personal interest in me, and since they had no outside interests, I was left totally to myself to provide entertainment and diversions. I made many attempts to mold into the family, but was frustrated by the mother and the general disinterest of all. Finally I gave up and left four weeks earlier than scheduled.

With this experience freshly in my mind I was apprehensive and did try to research the homestay situations in Antigua. Unfortunately, the general reports were not good with frequent complaints of too many students in a home or very poor food. Three days before my Spanish class was to begin I encountered a student who was experiencing some of my concerns, and his story only served to reinforce my fears.

Another homestay problem today from a recent student in Antigua. His family had been taking in students for seven years and were bored by the numbers and time. He only interacted at meal times, and the family had little or no interest in him other than as a boarder - money.

His family also had two other people from another school and did not want his school to know - business.

On my first day of classes I met my "own" family. My initial response to the family, an Electrolux salesman, his wife, four children and mother, was fairly favorable, but I was cautious.

(Day 1) Lunch goes well. The dining area is crammed with household junk because the family is in the middle of expanding the house. "More rooms, more students," I am told. "More money, too?", I wonder. Papa greets me warmly, "Mi casa es tu casa" (My house is your house), and tells me that if there are any problems, to let him know. They seem like nice people.

"Nice people", but having been conditioned by my encounter in Mexico and the reports of other students in Antigua, I was ever the pessimist and had my doubts as well.

Unfortunately, by the end of the first week I noticed a pattern which had developed.

(Day 5) I eat breakfast alone, and lunch and dinner with Papa if he is here. If he is not, I eat lunch with the oldest daughter and dinner with Mama, both of whom seem uninterested in conversation with me. They give presence but little conversation. There are a lot of embarrassed silences.

When I had first been introduced to my family, they were friendly enough, perhaps due to my newness, but the novelty wore off quickly. Because of the construction of the additional living space, there was no living room (it was being used as the dining room and as a bedroom at night), and consequently, I was confined to my room except at meal times. When I was not eating, my only options were to stay in my room or leave the house, and as a result, I was having neither the cultural nor the linguistic experiences I had hoped for in my homestay.

(Day 7) The family situation is becoming depressing, especially since I saw where Debbie moved on Sunday. I stopped there last night and heard more Spanish conversation in a short evening than I have almost since I arrived in my house. I certainly can't carry the conversa-

tion in my family. Papa is the only one that tries, but he is seldom around. I wonder if he thinks the rest of the family is making an effort??? Well, Mama and daughter are not. The atmosphere at the dining table with space for only two is not conducive [to the linguistic and cultural experiences I had been hoping for].

Debbie, too, had had an unacceptable living situation, and although her new home had two students including her, it was a far more agreeable situation, providing the cultural and linguistic opportunities I had been looking for. So I began to consider the possibility of moving there myself.

(Day 8) I made an attempt to converse with the daughter at lunch, but she didn't respond, and the meal ended in silence. Papa, who makes the most effort to make me feel at home, usually eats with Mama who likes to see him when he is home from work.

I certainly had no right to deny them their time together, but since my interaction with the family was limited to meal times and with only one disinterested member of the family even then, I decided to move in with Debbie's family.

(Day 9) Her situation offers more community. Maybe I won't get as much chance to speak Spanish, but I will be exposed to more Spanish and family, the reasons for the homestay.

The next day I informed my family of my decision to move. (Day 10) "They are unconcerned. I guess I'm another business proposition."

It was unfortunate that my homestay apprehensions had been born out, but I could and did move and thereafter stayed with my new family for six weeks, well after the end of my studies. The new family was smaller with a widow and her two daughters, and with my presence there were three students. Ironically, I was now in the type of living situation with several English speakers which I had first sought to avoid, but despite the number of students, the atmosphere was far more positive and conducive to the cultural and linguistic experiences I had been looking for in my previous

home. Certainly, the woman needed our room and board money since she was not a rich woman, but her desire was not so outwardly obvious, and with the personalities involved, there was a lot more community. The move was perhaps not positive to the opposite extreme because I spoke less Spanish in the group situation, but it was not negative, and thereafter I made no more entries in my diary about my homestay, a fact which indicated the elimination of this psychological problem from my studies. My homestay was no longer a problem.

The negative home environment had had a negative impact on my psyche and came as an additional problem to my developing disaffection with my learning situation. It was not, however, of immediate importance since it was physically disassociated from the school, and as a result, its cumulative effect on my studies was not noted as a source of concern in my diary until the end of the second week.

(Day 9) My depression of yesterday lifted somewhat. I had made my decision to change homes, and that must have lifted my spirits.

(Day 10) I have been depressed recently by Elena's disinterest and the decision to change my homestay, but today I went to class with enthusiasm.

The living environment, although not directly involved in the learning process, definitely had an influence on my learning, but its influence developed gradually and was seen less significantly than the problems I was having with the school. However, the decision to move was of such import that just making it raised my morale enough to make note of the event in my diary. The decision to extricate myself from my unworkable homestay had the very significant and positive effect of reinfusing me with enthusiasm to study. The living environment had become a definite distraction, a psychological impairment to my ability to study, an added burden.

TEACHERS

My three teachers (the first was also the last) over the four weeks were young women, approximately 20-25 years old, who were also evening students in a local university. They had all taught previously in the "Tikal School" before becoming disenchanted with its operation and breaking away as a group to form "Efectivo" as a cooperative. They were described in the school brochure as having "a minimum of two years experience in the science of teaching Spanish."

My first teacher was Maria whom I characterized as being (Day 1) "patient, soft spoken, basically good." Despite the fact that I chose her as my teacher the final week as well, these turned out to be the only good words that I had for her. I quickly noticed that her interest in teaching was strictly limited by the scheduled hours. (Day 1) "Maria is one of the quickest to get out of the room at the break bell and at the noon bell." Maria's dedication had time limits, and she was not going beyond them. Her teaching, too, had limits as she preferred the structured teaching of the book written by the school's nominal director. Since I wanted to express myself in other than the present tense, the first day I requested an introduction to the past tense.

(Day 1) Maria hesitates to give me material that comes out of sequence from the book. I had to be forceful to get the past tense today, and then I put pressure on her for the future tomorrow. I wonder if she will come through with it?

She did not and continued to limit her teaching to the book.

(Day 1) The day was spent with a lot of drills. We happened to finish with questions which provided the only minimal conversation.

(Day 3) Still my only complaint with Maria is her close work with the book.

I liked Maria as a person, but as a teacher she failed me with her

strict conformity with the book. (Day 3) "I asked Maria if she was bored, but she said, 'No.' I sometimes wonder how she can handle it?" Here it was only day 3, and already I was bored with both my teacher and the material.

(Day 5) I get a new teacher next week and am looking forward to the change. But at the same time, I am nervous about someone new.

I wanted a new teacher and the possibilities that a new and better teacher would offer, but after my first week's experience with Maria, I was also apprehensive that my new teacher would not live up to these expectations. Unfortunately, Elena was somewhat worse.

(Day 7) I got my new teacher yesterday and I don't like her too much. She corrects me immediately, rather than letting me know there is a mistake and letting me make the correction. And she usually corrects me by interrupting me. I'm not sure I can tell her, but should. Tomorrow?.... She also seems quite bored with everything. She spends a lot of her time preening her feathers and watching the clock. But she does like to talk, so there is more conversation.

Elena did give clearer explanations of the grammar than Maria, but I think Elena, too, was bored by the book as I had already become when I noted, (Day 2) "I found the exercises slow and boring." She liked to talk which offered more conversation, but past this she would not extend her teaching, and like Maria, she relied completely on the book.

(Day 8) Depressed! Like a piece of dead wood this morning which is not helped by Elena's lack of life. I asked for some review and all she did was have me repeat the same exercises directly from the book. No imagination!

And no effort. It was difficult to maintain my enthusiasm to learn when confronted by such teachers, but I did mention to her the problem I had with her manner of correcting me.

(Day 8) I requested that Elena just let me know when I make a mistake, but not to say what it is so I can correct myself. Still, little was served since she continued to let me know immediately, interrupting what I

was saying rather than waiting and allowing me to complete my sentence.

Since my mistakes were quite frequent at my level of learning, I was rarely able to utter a complete sentence, and she continually disturbed my train of thought.

My teachers were becoming great sources of discouragement, first Maria and now Elena with her own disinterest.

(Day 10) I have been depressed recently with Elena's disinterest and the decision to change my homestay, but today I went to class with enthusiasm. But still Elena's disinterest was not conquered, and she managed to depress me again. I don't feel that it is totally my responsibility to keep the class lively. Elena gives the best explanation of the grammar, but she also spends her time looking at her watch, and adjusting her dress and hair interminably. She bores me to the point that I am looking forward to leaving and wishing that I, too, had a watch to look at.

Elena gave good grammatical explanations, but that alone did not make her a teacher, nor did it make the class bearable, nor was it satisfactory for me as a student. Still I persisted, and having had two weeks to observe the other teachers, I chose one for my third week.

(Day 10) I have asked for Isabel as my teacher next week. She doesn't seem to spend her time looking at her watch and reviews regularly. She seems somewhat imaginative.

But Isabel's imagination did not extend beyond making me form my own examples during the exercises, and we continued to plod along through the book.

(Day 13) Isabel has me demonstrate understanding by having me make my own examples, but I find this limited because I mumble and stutter my example without fluency, showing nothing more than understanding of the grammar.

It was also very easy to simply mimic the examples of the grammatical structures, and I might possibly have not understood anything at all for all that she knew. Having shown that I could comprehend the grammar

point being taught, we moved along to the next and the next as I had been doing already for two weeks. Because of my dissatisfaction, however, I did ask for more conversation. (Day 13) "I expressed an interest in more conversation to try to improve my ability to speak and to comprehend," but by this time it was insufficient to correct the inadequacies of the course and came too late since I had only one week left to study. (Day 14) "I have decided to plod along next week to get the exposure to Spanish, to listening and to speaking." My goal had been to study four weeks of Spanish, and despite the teachers, I was going to complete it.

For the final week I chose Maria again. I was worried about whom I would get, and rather than risk a new teacher who could conceivably make my experience worse, I chose to go with a known quantity. Of course, she had not changed her methods and did not reinfuse me with enthusiasm for studying, but by this time I doubt any other teacher would have satisfied my needs either. I was resigned to my fourth and final week and just went to class.

(Day 16) The teachers and the method are failures for me. Simple plodding through the material with undirected conversation on the side does not permit retention.... Language learning should be fun, but this is dull. I have little motivation to study.

Maria continued to work totally with the book and was still very reluctant to deviate from its path.

(Day 20) Yesterday I asked for and received the future tense conjugation which came out of sequence from the book. Then Maria proceeded with the same transformation drills from the book and continued them again today. Then, today I asked for and got an introduction to the Spanish equivalent of the present perfect tense.

My teachers, so integral to any learning experience, had been so disappointing, frustrating all my efforts and goals. Despite the teachers' description in the brochure, they seemed to have learned nothing dur-

ing their "two years of experience" and "of the science of teaching Spanish." They might well have had the "two years of experience", but it did nothing without any sense of dedication or interest. Apparently they knew only how to follow the simple curriculum laid out in the book, and because they had little or no interest in me as a student, they never veered from this.

All my recent experiences in language learning had been enjoyable, in part because of the teachers who created an atmosphere conducive to learning. With my academic background in teaching I was very aware of the integral part the teacher must play in the learning process, but even by being personally aware of this, I could not assume the responsibility of the teachers, nor could I overcome their lack of inertia. The teaching was their responsibility, and if they could not take my interest and work from there, there was little I could do as long as I remained in their classes.

CURRICULUM/METHODS

The method of teaching employed by the teachers was based solely on a book and nothing more. All the teachers did nothing beyond the book except for the occasional personal request I made or except for the limited conversation which the teachers engaged in, which, of course, required no preparation.

The book was described in the school brochure:

The method that we use was innovated by a Guatemalan professor. It is based on a system of individualized learning.

Throughout the session, the student will participate in a series of directed conversations. Written exercises and grammar will be the basis of the learning procedure. This method lends itself to intuitive learning while translation is used as a complementary exercise.

The "method" was the book written by the "Guatemalan professor" who was the director of the school. His qualifications as a professor were never clear, but perhaps they were determined by virtue of his position as director and his interest in writing a book. Certainly the brochure was not exactly accurate.

The "individualized learning" was simply the "one on one" and had no connection to learning tailored to an individual's needs or desires as I had been led to believe during the initial school search. The book, itself, could just as easily have been used for several students as for one, and so, it, too, was not particularly "individualized". There were no "directed conversations" as claimed except for an occasional and rare reading passage followed by questions on content. The book did, however, contain the "written exercises and grammar" which were, in point of fact, the only "basis of the learning procedure". The grammar taught was in the form of exercises from the book. The "intuitive learning" might have been the realization of meaning from the examples presented in the book and from the teacher's explanations, but I was never quite sure. "Translation" was never used since none of the teachers spoke English.

I had an added difficulty since I did not have access to a copy of the book.

(Day 1) There is one problem in that I do not receive a copy of the book since it is as yet unpublished and exists only in manuscript form. Without it I have to take a lot of notes to permit practice and study after school. If this is a "programmed" progression of study, I would like to be able to have the book for reference and more thorough review.

In order to provide myself with good review materials I had to spend a lot of class time taking notes on each new grammar point. The book was a series of grammar points "programmed" from easy to difficult. One or more grammar points were presented at one time by example only, an example

designed to give meaning. The explanation was made by the teacher. This example was then followed by 4-6 exercises which were to be substituted and/or transformed into the grammatical structures of the original example. This, in absence of any other possibilities, might have been the "intuitive learning" described in the brochure.

Example: (The English translation is added)

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| A. | A mi, no me gustan los manias. | (I don't like |
| | peanuts.) | |
| | ¿Y, a ti? | (And you?) |
| B. | A mi, tampoco. | (Me, neither.) |
| A. | Entonces, mejor no los compramos. | (Then it's |
| | better that we don't buy them.) | |

This introduction of the grammar was then followed by several examples to be substituted and/or transformed into the original form.

1. (yo) hamburguesas, (tu) pedir.
2. (yo) películas de suspenso, (tu) ver.
- 3.
- 4.

The first example substituted:

- | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|
| A. | A mi, no me gustan las hamburguesas. |
| | ¿Y, a ti? |
| B. | A mi, tampoco. |
| A. | Entonces, mejor no los pedimos. |

After successful substitution and transformation of each, my teachers simply moved along to the next grammar point, a fact which I noticed quickly. (Day 3) "Still my only complaint with Maria is her close work with the book." This pattern continued and continued. Isabel, my third teacher, provided a little variation. (Day 12) "She has me form my own examples of grammatical forms that I have difficulty with," but this was definitely not enough.

The substitutions and transformations had a vague similarity to AL-M, but since only one satisfactory reproduction of the original grammar point usually seemed to satisfy the teachers, the exercises lacked the

numerous repetitions necessary for retention. My answers might have shown understanding, but as the examples became more complicated, I retained less and less, and since I usually stumbled through them, my responses were of questionable fluency. I was simply substituting and transforming without real retention as we moved through the book.

(Day 1) The day was spent with a lot of drills.

(Day 2) I'm understanding the grammar points, but not building fluency with them. There is insufficient drilling or directed use of them.

(Day 7) Feeling a need for something more than the book and the little conversation. Perhaps readings? Pictures? Directed work!

(Day 15) Becoming increasingly disappointed with the teaching and the method. The teachers don't review or drill or go beyond the book.

(Day 16) The teaching and the "method" are failures for me. Simple plodding through the material with undirected conversation on the side which does not drill the material. AL-M would be better. There is little or no chance to internalize the material before moving on.

The book did contain occasional dialogs, but they were long and rambling, and though they might have contained grammar points, at my level of learning they lacked necessary clarity and simplicity. They became exercises in reading aloud, while I was not required to show any understanding.

(Day 18) Same kind of exercise over and over. Transformation drills with usually four or five drills. A few fill in the blanks and a very occasional "discussion question". Any dialogs are usually long and more of an exercise in reading. Yesterday was the first time the dialog was followed by questions, but Maria wanted to skip the question with the most value for me, "What was the dialog about?", which would have given me the most opportunity for expression.

There were no review exercises to culminate a series of grammar points, and so the introduction of grammar was an endless progression. Conversation was not "directed", but rather rambling and seemed to occur frequently when the teacher became bored with the book.

With simply the book to follow the teachers and teaching were mechanical. The teachers needed to do no preparation and quite obviously did none, providing no variety. When I did make a request for material of personal interest, Maria was very discouraging and inflexible about complying with the request.

(Day 1) Maria hesitates to give me material that comes out of sequence from the book. I had to be forceful to get the past tense today and then I put pressure on her for the future tomorrow. I wonder if she will come through with it?

Maria's negative attitude to my request, coupled with the fact that none of the teachers ever asked if I had any special interests, discouraged me from making further requests until the end of the last week.

(Day 20) Yesterday I asked for and received the future tense conjugation which came out of sequence from the book. Then Maria proceeded with the same transformation drills from the book and continued them again today. Then, today, I asked for and got an introduction to the Spanish equivalent of the present perfect tense.

This was not the personalized instruction that I had been led to expect when I made the decision to attend "Efectivo".

With just the book to work with I became bored and believe the teachers to have been just as bored. Afterall, they had to use it month after month while I only used it for four weeks and became bored after a couple of days.

(Day 7) Elena seems quite bored with everything. She spends a lot of time preening her feathers...,but she does like to talk, so there is a lot of conversation.

She was probably bored with the repetitive quality of the book, but she preferred simple, undirected talk to making an investment of time and an effort to provide other material or activities, a characteristic which was typical of my other two teachers as well.

Review was not included as part of the curriculum in the book nor

was it provided by the teachers. When I received any, I normally had to ask for it, and even then it was not ongoing.

(Day 8) I asked for some review [from Elena] and all she did was have me repeat the same exercises.

(Day 15) I'm becoming increasingly disappointed with the teaching and the method. My teachers don't review or drill beyond the book. I always have to ask for review, and then it is not ongoing.

Maria did surprise me the last week, and I made note of it as a special event. (Day 16) "Today she reviewed without my asking."

With no specific cumulative review of the grammar, there was no reinforcement, and the teachers simply continued skipping along to newer and more complicated grammatical material with the often mistaken impression that since I was able to regurgitate an example of the grammar point, I had learned it.

Neither feedback nor some form of evaluation were included by any of the teachers. My insecurity and need for this showed quickly.

(Day 1) I wonder how I am doing?

(Day 5) I missed some sort of evaluation in my progress (or lack of it) this week. Maria asked me how I felt, and I said I wished my Spanish were more fluid in speaking. She said it should be better by the end of the third week.

That was the extent of the feedback and the teacher interest in me during my four weeks of study.

Since I both expected feedback and felt my teachers were really disinterested, the feedback on my performance was something I was reluctant to ask for, and because I did not ask for it and the teachers showed no interest, I never did receive any evaluation on my performance. Had there been an attempt at exchange between my teachers and me, we might have better understood each other, me in my learning and them in their teaching, and I would have avoided what became a negative experience. By

talking out my feelings about the pace, the book and its plodding format, and all my frustrations, I would probably have been much happier and more successful. Unfortunately, I doubt such an exchange would have occurred since the teachers, as a rule, made no effort to go beyond the book or provide simple, undirected conversations.

Although I am not aware of the educational system in Guatemala, in retrospect I now wonder if I was also experiencing typical Guatemalan teaching and attitudes. Perhaps my teachers knew nothing more about teaching than from their own experiences as students, experiences which conditioned them to become typical examples of Guatemalan teachers themselves?

INDIVIDUAL/PERSONALITY

Because of my previous successes in language learning and because of my recent experiences in teaching English as a second language, I began my Spanish class setting high standards for myself and having high expectations of success and expected the same from my teachers. Unfortunately, after four weeks of study I found my aims to have been totally unrealistic with regard to the teachers, method and curriculum.

My problems were, however, not just with my homestay, my teachers, the method and materials, but I also had problems of a more personal nature in relation to these factors - me.

Before I even began studying I was questioning whether seven hours would be too long to study everyday, wondering if seven hours would not require too much investment from me. Since most schools offered the option of four or seven hours, I decided during the school elimination process to only study four. "I'm choosing four hours of study initially, wondering if seven might not be overwhelming." I was worried about the

extended period of concentration that would be required in the close confines of the "one on one". Perhaps, too, I was questioning my own ability to function as an individual in this situation, something I certainly wonder about now.

As a student I quickly learned my limits, and found that in the confines of "one on one" I was soon exhausted from the necessity to concentrate for the prolonged period. Before day 3 I had been considering the option of studying seven hours the second week, but by day 3 I was leaning towards continuing with four, and on day 4 I made my decision.

(Day 1) Could I handle 3 hours of study in the afternoon?

(Day 2) I'm exhausted!

(Day 3) I'm thinking of continuing with four hours next week.

(Day 4) I have decided to continue studying only four hours per day.

The "one on one" put immense strain on me, requiring me to be constantly alert for the full duration of the four hour session, and by day 4 I had realized these pressures of four hours of individual, one-on-one study. The concentration necessary was exhausting. I was concentrating on the teacher and the material, doing oral recitation, and taking notes so I could study after class. I was also studying at home in the afternoon and evening and did not see that I could possibly study another three hours.

Soon, too, the amount of material taught in those four hours of study began to totally overwhelm me.

(Day 13) I have decided to quit. I think I've reached the saturation point for now. The grammar comes, and I can understand it when it's written and in front of me where I can see it, but I can't hear it when spoken to or express it clearly.

The material as introduced in the curriculum was presented much too fast

for me, and I became depressed with my inability to maintain pace with it.

(Day 14) Do I expect too much of myself at this stage of learning? Should I be able to absorb it all? And use it all immediately? When I really had no more than a basic knowledge of Spanish before and could not speak other than haltingly.

I was realizing that I could not learn it all and that I did, in fact, expect too much of myself, but at the time I could not and did not come to a total realization of this. As a result, I continued to study and be depressed by my inability to absorb the material, compounded by this time by my problems with the teachers, method and curriculum.

I had perceived one-on-one instruction as offering unlimited opportunity to satisfy my personal linguistic needs, but this perception was never fulfilled, in part due to my own lack of assertiveness. The first day I requested the conjugation of the past tense, an area of special interest for me.

(Day 1) Maria hesitates to give me material that comes out of sequence from the book. I had to be forceful to get the past tense today and then I put pressure on her for the future for tomorrow. I wonder if she will come through with it?

She resisted my request on day 1, but I was persistent enough to overcome this resistance. However, the next day when Maria failed to give me the future, I did not persist and ask again. Maria, by denying me my request, stopped me from making further requests. She was so reticent that first day to give me material not included sequentially in the book that I did not want to risk antagonizing her further by asking for the future again. I was also sufficiently discouraged by her attitude that I only made a personal request once before the final week. (Day 13) "I expressed an interest in more conversation to try to improve my ability to speak and to comprehend." In the final week I had Maria again, and although she was still quite anxious and discouraging when I again requested

the future, she did comply with my request.

(Day 20) Yesterday I asked for and received the future tense conjugation which came out of sequence from the book. Then Maria proceeded with the same transformation drills from the book and continued them again today. Then today I asked for and got an introduction to the Spanish equivalent of the present perfect tense.

After being discouraged and relying on my expectations of what a teacher would give me in the "one on one", I simply let the situation continue which only made it worse in the end. Then, too, continually demanding extraneous materials from the reluctant teachers might not have made the class any better.

When I went to school to be taught Spanish, I did not give up my responsibility to study. I did study, but it was very difficult in light of these teachers who did not take any responsibility for my learning themselves, unless, of course, one can refer to rote use of the book as teacher responsibility. It became necessary to ask for materials, but as already mentioned, I am not a person who makes too many demands.

(Day 18) I am not assertive enough in demanding work beyond the book. I expect it from the teacher. It is her business to provide diversity and to build enthusiasm.

The cumulative effect of my disillusionment with the teachers, the methods employed, the book and my perceived inability to cope with the pace of the material was a growing insecurity, depression and sense of failure. On day 13 I had decided to quit, but by day 15 I still wanted to continue, motivated only by the goals I had set for myself when I had started.

(Day 13) I have decided to quit at the end of the week.

(Day 15) My insecurity and depression abated somewhat and I have decided to continue next week.

(Day 16) I decided to quit today over an unexpected scheduling change. Actually I'm not too excited by the prospect of five more days of school. The teaching is

not effective as in the name of the school, "Efectivo", and I grasped at the easy excuse of the scheduling change to quit. Then, having vented my rage over this incident, I was overcome by guilt for not studying the final week that I had set out to study, and I decided again to continue.... I have little or no chance to internalize the material before moving on.

On day 16 I had summed up my problems - the pace of the material, the teaching, and my perceived failure - but by using the unforeseen scheduling change as an outlet for my frustrations, I felt sufficient relief to finish the last week of study to which I had committed myself. This, unfortunately, was a mistake.

(Day 17) I had a violent rejection of Spanish today to the point I almost got up and left. I was frustrated with the new grammar which seemed incomprehensible.

I had reached beyond the point of diminishing returns with my studies. Between the teachers, the method, the materials and my depression, I was no longer learning and probably had not been learning too much since I had written, (Day 13) "I think I have reached the saturation point," and the cumulative effects of this problem along with the frustrations of teaching, the method and the pace were too difficult for me to overcome to continue learning.

(Day 17) I read a poem today. At first I balked, thinking my Spanish was not advanced enough for poetry, but then I began to enjoy it. Why am I fighting the Spanish? I am interested. Is it disappointment in the teaching? or my own progress?

It was both, but by this point my studies had become fruitless. I was prolonging what had become for me the daily masochism of attending class. The material had been introduced faster than my ability to internalize it. The teachers had failed to notice, and I was not strong enough to tell them. The teachers had failed to be sensitive to my requests, to my lack of progress and to my disappointments. I had rejected the materials and I had rejected the teachers. I was no longer open to learning. The

entire experience had become almost a nightmare for me.

CONCLUSION

THE LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

This experience learning Spanish was obviously a failure for me, and what I have written is an indictment of my particular, personal experience, but it is not intended as an indictment of the "one on one". Unfortunately, it was negative, but nevertheless, it was certainly unique. No one individual could ever duplicate it with the variables involved: location, personalities, cultural and personal backgrounds, method, and materials. For others, and I would hope even for me, studying "one on one" might be successful given the correct combination. However, as a result of my experience I do feel that I learn best and would prefer studying in a situation in which there are at least several other students.

This realization came gradually as my problems grew and did not become apparent until my third week of study. It began with my difficulties coping with the intensity of the close personal contact with only the teacher and the new language for four hours daily and progressed to a total rejection of the learning situation because of my reactions to my teachers, the method and materials used, and my own perceived failure.

It could be said that my conclusions on the one-on-one aspect of the situation are not valid because they are based on my disappointment with the homestay, the teachers, the teaching, and my progress which led me to reject the experience in its entirety; I did not succeed and therefore, I concluded that it was the fault of those other variables and the "one on one"; I felt I had the motivation and the background to be a successful language learner, and therefore, it could not be my fault that I was not; I felt my course was badly designed and taught; I did not learn as much as I had wanted; and I was depressed and rejected the teachers and the

method. I think to a degree I have done all this, but I am also trying to view the experience in an objective manner.

Of course, it was easy to rationalize and lay the blame on the total experience, but the problems I experienced were simply forced into sharper focus by the extreme nature of the situation. Its total negativity heightened my awareness of the problems I was having, problems which might well have remained hidden in a situation in which I, as the learner, was more successful and happier.

The problems I encountered were widespread: the homestay, the method and materials, the teachers, and I do not deny that I had personal problems functioning in the situation. My experience is not, because of its nature, reason to reject wholeheartedly the one-on-one teaching/-learning concept, but I must conclude that I learn much better in a class situation for some very valid, personal reasons which can be applied to a comparison of a class versus the "one on one" in general.

During the school search I had been very interested in one of the schools which had offered classes, but I had not given any real thought to why I was interested. Obviously I had my fears about the "one on one", but I did not realize it. Before I began my studies I only thought that seven hours would be too much, a fear which became reality when I decided during the first week not to study seven hours the second week. Wanting to ease myself into studying I had opted for the four hours because seven seemed like too much investment in the beginning. During the rest of the first week and the second week, I continued to be concerned with the personal problems I was having with the homestay, teachers, etc., and it was not until the third week that I even began to question the efficacy of studying in a class situation as compared to the "one on one" I was in. (Day 14) "Do I need a class situation to learn?" By "class situation" I

meant at least several students or perhaps more, but what was it about the class that I needed in order to learn?

(Day 14) I wonder if I need more repetition of sounds and grammar than I get in this "one on one"?

(Day 16) I lack the enthusiasm I had learning Thai. I liked the class atmosphere and the teachers, and the way they worked together with the class..... I have little motivation to study. This lacks the sense of competition and achievement I get in a class. It lacks the dynamics of the class.

I had identified certain aspects of the class which I missed, but perhaps my final observation about lacking "the dynamics of the class" best summarized my need. When I had written, (Day 16) "I lack the enthusiasm I had learning Thai", I was searching for a success to support myself in my frustrations and sense of failure I had in this "one on one", but I had liked my classes as well. I had liked the other students and my teachers, and I had had very positive learning experiences. The class must certainly have been a strong factor in my learning. On day 16 I had only observed that the class permitted more repetition and gave me a sense of competition and thus achievement, and that it created an atmosphere more conducive to learning for me. It was in retrospect that I also found more answers to my needs in the class situation: an increased exposure to language through the interaction of additional students; an ability to use far greater range of materials and/or activities; and a more relaxed atmosphere.

Rather than listening constantly to oneself, a student in a class is exposed to several or many students and with this exposure comes added input. With the presence of more than one student there is greater repetition of the sounds and the grammar of a language, and a learner also experiences second-hand learning through the interaction between students. As well as hearing and learning from the correct answers of

others, one learns also from their mistakes and is exposed to a wider variety of conversation and its appropriate vocabulary as each individual adds his/her own unique ideas and varied input of vocabulary. With just myself and my teacher providing the input and me making the mistakes I was in a very restricted situation.

Although language learning is not a contest, a class can permit individual stimulation through competition, an element I had noticed as missing. (Day 16) "This lacks the sense of competition ... I get in a class." A student may use another student or students as a norm to compete against, if not just to measure oneself against. This "competition" is an incentive to study and also provides informal feedback which can be an added advantage in the absence of formal teacher feedback.

In my Thai classes there was a Vietnamese student who always did very well in her studies. Although I never "competed" directly with her, she did become my standard in the class and served as a personal gauge of my performance. I could never perform better than her, but I did try, and my own learning was definitely enhanced by her presence.

Of course, in my "one on one" I lacked completely for any variety in activities and/or materials because of my teachers, but I feel a class would permit a far greater opportunity for varied teaching than the "one on one". Again the limits imposed by one teacher and only one student tend to restrict what can be done to vary teaching. My teachers chose to use only the book, a very narrow tool, for their teaching, but had they thought of it, there were numerous possibilities of using materials or techniques which could have been employed to advantage. Still, the presence of several students would have permitted an even wider range. For example, language learning games or peer teaching would be impossible without other students.

An important aspect that I missed was the "atmosphere" of a class which I find more relaxed. Personally I am much more comfortable in a class with the presence of several other people. The "one on one" was extremely threatening by the nature of the situation - two people, one the knower and me, the learner. A class with the same constant flow of information does not focus attention on an individual continuously, but momentarily, reducing the pressure on any one individual. In the "one on one", on the other hand, the stress of being continuously attentive - reciting, worrying about making mistakes, correcting mistakes, taking notes, listening to the teacher, etc. - is extremely nerve wracking for me. The individual student is the class, the total focus of the learning process, and needs to concentrate all the time. Rather than there being a constant and consequently exhausting need to be attentive, the class permits time to listen and to learn from others, to relax and an opportunity to reflect on what has passed, to think about what one is learning.

Despite an overwhelming personal attraction to a class learning situation, I do feel that the "one on one" does have certain advantages over the class situation, but unfortunately, they were not exploited in my case. The "one on one" allows a greater opportunity for the development of a rapport between the student and teacher. Although I never felt totally alienated by my teachers, there certainly was no closeness or friendship either. On day 1 I had characterized Maria as "soft spoken" and "patient", but she did appear "to be the quickest to get out of the room at the break and at noon". Contact with my teachers was limited to the sessions, seemingly by their choice and ended at the end of each week by the nature of the system. As mentioned, the feedback was nonexistent, but it might have developed naturally had there been any attempt at developing rapport between my teachers and me.

The "one on one" also offers a unique opportunity for the teacher to meet an individual student's needs, to focus study on the student's interests and, thereby, to utilize this interest for greater learning. Unfortunately, I was discouraged from making requests for material of personal relevance the first day and, consequently, did not attempt another request until the next to last day, but by then it was too late.

Additionally, the "one on one" forestalls any problems arising from a group of mixed abilities which I had considered in my rejection of one school before coming to "Efectivo". The teaching level is that of the single student, and the problems of having "faster" or "slower" students and any subsequent disruption of the group teaching and/or learning are avoided.

My experience also points out possible pitfalls of the "one on one", though in my situation they were in the extreme and hopefully would not happen to others. By necessity the teacher and the materials need to be of high quality. Teachers need to be sensitive, understanding, interested in teaching and the student, and especially motivated and conscientious. Additionally, the materials and method must provide variety and quality to maintain student motivation to study and to prevent boredom or burnout from overwork. These pitfalls are normally associated with the class situation as well, but in the intensity of the "one on one" they assume a far greater importance.

In retrospect, I now see that I found the experience objectionable as well because I was subconsciously expecting a more functional curriculum, although I did not realize it at the time. I had been conditioned by my travels and my Thai and Spanish learning experiences towards learning language on a functional basis, learning to survive initially and expanding gradually from this base. In Antigua I had wanted to build my abili-

ties to communicate, not just to increase grammar and vocabulary ad nauseum. As a student I had my goals, and Maria, in denying me my request, was denying my need as a learner. She had her ideas of what I should learn and she was not going to change them. It was up to me to compromise, but that was just as difficult for me as for her. I think I learn languages well, but I am not a rapid learner. Learning to communicate is a gradual process for me, and although I think I have a reasonably good ear for sounds, I need to move slowly, using the vocabulary and grammar repeatedly before becoming comfortable with it and hopefully, retaining it. Unfortunately, neither the teachers nor the curriculum answered these needs, and I rapidly, but still without complete consciousness, rejected the course as well.

Would I attempt another one-on-one language learning experience? Even though I found my experience in Antigua as objectionable as I did, I would still consider another opportunity. Based on my experiences I would, of course, be a lot more careful in my research, looking at the teacher(s) and curriculum in far greater detail, but given the choice between "one on one" and a class, I would definitely opt for the class.

THE DIARY STUDY

This first time diary study has provided me with both an interesting experience as a diarist and a researcher, and an effective means of analyzing my language acquisition experience. Although it was difficult at times to write about my day-to-day experiences and feelings due to their general negativity, the final result was a diary which reflected my experience. I had begun keeping it with the objective of examining my language acquisition strategies, but due to the circumstances of the experience, it veered from this objective and developed its own focus, my reactions to

the total experience. Even though the final diary did not meet my original goals, I do not feel that this development was bad. Rather, its focus was more personally significant since it grew naturally out of the learning experience, and consequently, the resultant diary study became more than just an academic study for me.

How a diarist approaches his/her diary is a personal decision, but on the basis of my experience I would suggest an approach of a broader nature, combining both systematic questioning and general reflection. By abandoning my original objective, I limited the scope of my research tool. Therefore, in order to have a broadly based diary with which to work, I suggest that the diarist devise and answer daily certain questions or topics based on a defined objective as well as include any general feelings and/or observations. Furthermore, the diarist should review these latter diary entries periodically for significant trends which could bear more detailed scrutiny on a daily basis. The objective is still the central focus of the diary, but the diary does not limit itself and might, therefore, become a more significant research tool.

As a method of acquiring knowledge of the language acquisition process the diary study offers an opportunity for both objective and subjective analysis of individual language acquisition experiences. The results are limited in their scope to the individual in the diary and do not necessarily offer a broad view of the population. However, as more diary studies of language acquisition are written, the results, when taken together, will hopefully reveal broader based conclusions, commonalities of the learning process, which can be applied to the improvement of language learning/learning.

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